

Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Education Reimbursement Initiative

Through the Governor's Office for Early Childhood Development (GOECD), with funding from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), and in partnership with the Illinois Network of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), a program was implemented to address potential financial barriers to advancing or completing educational goals at accredited Illinois institutions of higher education.

The time-limited Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Education Reimbursement Initiative was identified as a way to support the early childhood workforce in Illinois. Program applications were made available in May 2020 and accepted until all funds were obligated. This opportunity was made available statewide, with priority given to early educators in the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Group 2 counties.

As a result, reimbursements totaling \$56,250, at a maximum of \$375 per person, were distributed to over 160 early educators to alleviate financial barriers such as tuition, fees, and outstanding student debt at accredited Illinois institutions of higher education. At the conclusion of this program, an analysis of the data gathered was completed.

While the initiative was successful in its ability to provide varying amounts of relief for recipients, recommendations for further supporting early educators and addressing their higher education barriers are needed for increased success in the future. These recommendations include:

- Increase the maximum education reimbursement amount payable per person to allow for more forward movement in the workforce toward degree completion, attainment of official transcripts, and additional professional development advancements.
- Allow those who received reimbursements from a previous year to apply, at a full or prorated reimbursement amount, in future years to address new debt and current enrollment at an accredited Illinois institution of higher education.
- Create a system that allows payments for current outstanding debt to be made directly to accredited Illinois institutions of higher education. This ensures that applicable balances are paid down, and any future penalties such as the inability to and/or obtain official transcripts are significantly reduced.
- Prioritize reimbursements to support recipients pursuing coursework and degrees in or related to Early Childhood Education/Child Development. This investment highlights the importance of a highly qualified, diverse workforce across the state, while also addressing financial barriers and advancing educational outcomes for Illinois early educators

